

Court of Appeals Judge with Honorable Cynthia Diane Stephens, District I

Keywords

Administrative Hearings – Held within the executive branch, these hearings resolve disputes about decisions made by executive branch agencies. Areas include benefit services, corrections, employment, licensing, regulations, and taxes. See [Michigan Office of Administrative Hearings and Rules](#).

Adoption – A court process that allows a person to become the legal parent of a child for whom they are not the biological parent. Sometimes, adoptive families are called “forever families”.

Appeal – A request to a higher court to change the judgment of a lower court.

Attorney – A professional who has earned a law degree, passed the bar exam, and is licensed by the State Bar of Michigan to practice law in the state. Also known as a lawyer.

Circuit Court – A trial court that handles felonies (serious crimes); civil lawsuits over \$25,000; and family matters, such as divorce, child custody, adoptions, child protective proceedings, juvenile delinquency, and personal protection orders. Circuit Courts also hear cases appealed from lower courts.

Court of Appeals – The Michigan court in which appeals from the probate courts, court of claims, and circuit courts are heard and decided. It also hears appeals from administrative agencies within the executive branch.

Dispute – A disagreement between two or more people or groups of people, called parties.

District Court – A trial court that handles civil suits involving up to \$25,000; adult criminal misdemeanor offenses; civil infractions; landlord/tenant disputes; small claims; ordinance and charter violations; and land contract forfeitures. Additionally, all adult criminal proceedings begin in the District Court. In carrying out this function, the District Court issues arrest and search warrants, sets bail, accepts bonds, conducts arraignments and probable cause conferences, and presides over preliminary examinations.

Factual Finding – Trial courts are responsible for deciding the facts of a case, such as finding someone guilty of a crime or being responsible for paying money to the other side in a civil case.

Graduate School – College-level training beyond a bachelor’s (undergraduate) degree. Usually, the term refers to study other than law school or medical school.

Judge – A judge is an elected official given authority to make decisions in civil and criminal proceedings in a court of justice. To serve in the state’s judicial branch of government, a judge must be admitted to the practice of law for at least five years and be less than 70 years old at the time of election or appointment (to fill a vacancy). A justice is a judge of a supreme court.

Law School – A three-year course of study after earning a bachelor’s (undergraduate) degree; schools must be accredited (officially approved) by the American Bar Association.

Motion to Reconsider – A legal filing asking a court to reconsider a decision.

Private Practice – Working in a law firm (business) that is not part of the government or another company.

Probate Court – This trial court handles wills, administers estates and trusts, orders treatment for mentally ill persons, and appoints guardians and conservators.

Town Halls – Meetings where officials answer specific questions asked by people who attend.

Trial Court – The level of courts where the facts of a case are decided. Most cases start and stop here. In Michigan, District Court, Probate Court, and Circuit Court are all trial courts.

For more definitions, see the Michigan Judicial Institute's [Handbook of Legal Terms](#).